

1075

SPEECH
OF
HON. T. POLK, OF MISSOURI,
ON THE
ACQUISITION OF CUBA.

DELIVERED IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES, FEBRUARY 17, 1859.

The Senate having under consideration the bill for the acquisition of Cuba—
Mr. POLK said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: The bill before us proposes the acquisition of the Island of Cuba, by purchase, from Spain. The question is, ought the measure to find favor with the American Senate? This depends, in my judgment, on the following considerations:

1. Whether the island will be advantageous to us, promotive of our material interests and our national welfare, and at the same time not injurious to the people of the island?
2. Is purchase the proper method to be adopted for its acquisition?
3. Have we the ability to pay the purchase money?
4. Is the present a fitting juncture to propose the negotiation?

Let us briefly examine these considerations.

1. Will the island be valuable to us?

The shore of the Gulf of Mexico is an immense circle of irregular circumference. Its continuity is broken by a segment exceedingly small when compared with the length of its entire periphery. This Gulf is a great sea, thrusting itself between North and South America, and dividing the New World into two great continents—a northern and a southern one. It is emphatically the great “Mediterranean sea” of the western hemisphere.

Two nations hold the dominion of its shores—Mexico and the United States. The larger part is held by the United States. Five of the States of our Union are washed by its waves. Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida, in part encompass it. It lies, as it were, in the very embrace of our Confederacy. And, from this fact alone, we ought to be permitted to claim it, as the Romans did the Adriatic, as *mare nostrum*—our own sea.

The waters from full one half of the territory of the United States are drained into it. Of the large number of rivers which fall into it, three fourths of them find their mouths within our territory. And of these rivers, all the important ones flow through the territory of the United States. One river alone—that “great Father of Waters,” the Mississippi, with its tributaries, pours into it, the waters of more than one-sixth part

of the North American continent. Rising far up in the regions of our utmost northern boundary, it makes its majestic way southwardly to the gulf—broad, deep, and mighty, capable of bearing on its bosom the commerce of the mightiest republican empire the world has ever seen; dividing, near its centre, the great continental valley between the Alleghenies and the Stony Mountains, and reaching with its branches to every portion and extreme of that vast valley—a great MEDITERRANEAN river, tributary to this mediterranean sea.

The river navigation within our own borders, communicating with the Gulf of Mexico, is more than twenty-five thousands of miles in length. By the application of steam, this is all available to the uses of commerce. Already there floats on it a steam tonnage as large, perhaps, as that of all the world besides; and that, too, when a large proportion of the river basins, fertilized and drained by it, is unbroken forest and prairie, where the plow has never marked the soil. The Gulf of Mexico is, therefore, *our sea*, because it receives our waters, as well as because it is embraced by our coasts.

These rivers run, not from east to west, but from north to south. If their course were in an easterly and westerly direction, they would traverse the same climate, and, consequently, on their banks there would be no variety of productions. But, on the contrary, flowing from north to south, the longest of them pass through almost all the changes of climate, from the frigid to the torrid zone; and, consequently, in their long and fertile valleys, almost every species of animal and vegetable life abounds. Proceeding from the source to the mouth, there is a constant variety of plants, and of necessity there is a constant and correspondent variety in the animals on the banks; different quadrupeds, different birds, and different fishes, at each successive stage of the progress.

This variety of productions induces and necessitates the exchange of commodities; and that exchange constitutes commerce.

Trade must always follow the channels which nature has marked out for it. Facility and cheapness make this result inevitable. By consequence, the productions of the vast valley of the Mississippi, and also of the basins of the other Gulf rivers, unsurpassed in extent and fertility, will find their way to a market through the Gulf. What the amount of these productions is to be when these valleys, in all their immense length and breadth and teeming productiveness, shall be densely populated and fully cultivated, it would perhaps be vain to guess, because impossible to compute. But even now, in the very first stages of development, it rises to the enormous sum of about three hundred millions of dollars every year. Even at the present moment, therefore, production and commerce also make the Gulf *mare nostrum*.

I have said, Mr. President, that the form of our Gulf is that of an irregular circle, hugely expanded, to be sure, but still an immense circle. This fact gives to it the greatest possible adaptation to commercial uses. It is thereby more compact. Its different ports and places are closer together. It can be traversed from any one point to every other in straight lines, and therefore in the shortest lines. And the shortest lines from port to port are by water. Hence ships can traverse it in much less time, and gather its commodities and make its commercial exchanges at much less cost, than can be done upon any other sea as large, on the face of the globe. The freedom and control of such a sea, situated as I have shown this to be, is indispensable to our growth and greatness.

I remark further, upon the shape of this Gulf. Its encircling shore is open but on one side—its southeastern. With this exception, it is completely land-locked; in fact, it is a perfect "*cul de sac*." But across the mouth of the bag lies the Island of Cuba, stretching almost from shore to shore of the opening. Its western end, at Cape San Antonio, reaches far towards the main land of Yucatan, which also advances far to meet it at Cape Catoche. And the Keys of Florida approximate so closely to the north shore of the island, that the booming of the morning gun from the Moro castle, may almost wake the slumbers of the Tortugas of Florida.

Thus there are but two portals opening from the Gulf to the Atlantic. The situation of the first named, and the winds and currents which, in a great degree bar its passage to outward-bound ships, almost make it a closed channel. The open and facile one which trade frequents, and through which commerce finds an easy transit, is the northern one, between the island shore and the projecting point of the peninsula of Florida. Through this, therefore, must pass, in all time to come, the constantly increasing and the never ending productions and exports of the great river basins of the Gulf, as well as the rich equivalents to be received in exchange for them.

This channel is so narrow, that the commerce which floats on it, passes along the northern shore of Cuba, within gun-shot of her fortifications. A few heavy war steamers would effectually close it—hermetically seal it.

There lies Cuba, holding in her hand the scepter of the Gulf, and commanding the mouth of the Mississippi—our Mississippi. When I say *our* Mississippi, I say it with emphasis and with feeling; because my own State, a part of the upper Louisiana, lies about the center of the valley, and on the right bank of the river. Suppose Cuba to be in the possession of a great naval Power, as England, or even France; and suppose such Power to use her for the purpose of blockading the Gulf: what would become of our commerce on that sea, and the surplus products of the sixteen States of the Union, and the vast Territories yet to become States, which are dependent on that sea? The stoppage of that commerce, and the loss of the productions that flow into that sea from these river basins, for a single season, would cost us incalculably more than the highest price that has ever been estimated for Cuba.

Suppose England firmly established in possession of that island; then let her have naval stations at the Bahamas, and also in her possessions to the north of us: what would be our condition? Our whole Atlantic sea-board covered and darkened and blockaded by her ships-of-war; it needs no description from me to be appreciated.

But this is not all. England, in possession of Cuba on the north, and at the same time owning Jamaica and many of the Windward and Leeward islands on the east, and on the main land holding British Guiana on the south, and the Balize and the Mosquito coast on the west, she would surround the Caribbean sea, and hold it, as it were, in the hollow of her hand.

Still further. Cuba, Mr. President, lies right across the track of our great Isthmian transit routes between our Atlantic sea-board and our Pacific coast. So that, in the absence of a Pacific railroad across the continent, for all purposes of trade and travel, Cuba lies *geographically* between our possessions on the Pacific and the States on the eastern side of the Rocky Mountains. The gold of California all comes to us through her

ports. Thus Cuba, in the possession of an enemy, would not only be an impediment to our development, but the destruction of our Gulf trade, and of our communication with the Pacific, and also of incalculable damage to our safety even.

That she should belong to the United States, therefore, is of the very highest moment, alike to our growth, our commerce, and our security. Possessed of her, we possess and command the Gulf; we control the transit routes across the continent, and hold the commercial intercourse between the Atlantic and Pacific in our grasp. Moreover, we stand in a position to win the mastery over the Caribbean sea, and to subject the productions of its tropical river basins to our uses, and its commerce to our aggrandizement.

Cuba is the counterpart, as it were, of the valley of the Mississippi. Her productions are the reciprocals of those of the United States. She has sugar, coffee, tobacco, and tropical fruits, to exchange with us, for our surplus of flour and breadstuffs, rice, potatoes, beef, pork, lard, and lumber. Cuba, in this respect is, on the one hand necessary to the United States, and on the other the United States is necessary to her. Hence, in spite of most exorbitant imposts, both on exports as well as imports; in spite of differential duties against the United States on all importations from this country; in spite of heavy tonnage duties and port charges, a large commerce is, notwithstanding all, still carried on between the island and this country. More than one-third of all the exports from the island come to this country, and more than one-fifth of all her imports are received from the United States, although the unnatural step-mother does everything in her power, and more than ever was imposed by any other parent country upon her dependent colony, to compel her to receive her imports from Spain. On every barrel of flour imported from the United States there is a differential duty against the United States of \$8 31 more than is imposed upon the inferior flour imported from Spain. And there is a like discrimination against this country, on all other commodities imported from it into the island. So, also, the tonnage duty exacted from American shipping, is \$1 37½ per ton more than is levied upon Spanish. In short, our competition with Spain for the trade with Cuba, is the most unequal on the whole globe. Yet, still, we even now furnish the island with food and raiment and houses and furniture and domestic utensils and agricultural implements. Let Cuba be acquired, and all these restrictions and abuses would at once and forever cease.

Now, suppose our commerce with the island unshackled and our trade free, all imposts and duties abolished, to what incalculable totals would it not swell? Instead of only about six thousand barrels of flour annually; as is now the case, the aggregate would doubtless reach one million two hundred thousand—about one barrel for each inhabitant. Here would be an increase of two hundred-fold upon a single article; and all other articles of our export thither, would probably be augmented in the same ratio. And many more articles would doubtless be added to the list, which have never heretofore been known there. Thus, Cuba would be the best market for our agricultural productions that the world could offer. And this market would be a domestic one, certain and unfailing. What an unprecedented stimulus would thus be applied to our agricultural industry! The same would be true of our manufactures. The mills and work-shops of our manufacturing States, would be pressed to their utmost capacity of production. Our artisans and operatives would find constant and remun-

nerative employment, while mechanical skill and invention would be taxed to their highest achievement.

But what would be the effect in the meantime upon Cuba? This abundant and cheapened supply of all their wants, would engender necessarily, a corresponding and commensurate increase of production, by the inhabitants of the island. More than all, American skill and enterprise would be introduced there to raise the swelling tide. This increase would lessen the prices and multiply to us the supplies of sugar, coffee, tropical fruits, and West India goods, until every citizen would have them within his easy reach, upon such terms as would diminish in proportion, our present annual expenditure for these necessities, to an unparalleled extent. On the other hand, there would be a reciprocal advantage to the people of Cuba, in the abundance and cheapness of the supplies furnished to them from the United States. Proportionate to the augmentation of the interchange of commodities between this country and Cuba, would be the advance and extension of our navigation interests. Our mercantile marine, already the equal of any of the maritime nations of the world, would then soon stand without a rival. Thus the purchase would be mutually of immense benefit both to us and to Cuba. For myself, my imagination can picture nothing to be compared to it.

Let this Queen of the Antilles be adopted into the sisterhood of our confederated States; let the flag of our Union float over Cuba, and we will hold unchallengeable dominion over the Gulf of Mexico. That sea will not only be *mare nostrum*, but, at our pleasure, a *mare clausum*. Its commerce, its forts, and its defences, will be in our own hands.

We have already the world-monopoly of the production of cotton; we hold the British leviathan now with a *cotton hook* in his mouth. With Cuba incorporated with us, we shall monopolize the world's supply of sugar and molasses, as completely, as we now do, its supply of cotton.

The trade of the tropics, Mr. President, is that which most enriches its fortunate possessor. Through California, we may out-compete our rivals for the trade of the East Indies; and with Cuba, we may draw to ourselves the trade of the West Indies. In former ages, and before the discovery of the New World, the trade of the East Indies was the richest on the earth, and made its possessor great and mighty. But in modern times the tropical trade of the West Indies, has grown up to a rival importance. With the monopoly of the trade of both the Indies—the East and West—we shall stand in the advance of all competition.

The Island of Cuba, Mr. President, is well suited to accommodate a commerce of gigantic proportions. Its coast is studded with a succession of harbors unequalled in number and accommodations, in the same length of shore-line, in any part of the globe, ample both for military and commercial uses. She has on her northern coast, thirty-seven harbors suitable for commercial purposes, and thirteen on her southern. She has also not less than thirteen harbors in which a line-of-battle ship may ride in safety, and which are capacious enough to afford safe anchorage to a whole navy of such ships. As a strategical point, this gem of the Antilles is not surpassed by any other on the surface of the round earth.

Is this all that may be said of Cuba? No, sir; by no means. A climate genial and salubrious; a landscape diversified and beautiful; its surface green and blooming with tropical exuberance; a soil of unsurpassed richness, abundantly fructified by teeming waters. The sun, in his course,

does not look down upon a fairer land, nor one more capable of administering to the wants and gratifying the luxuries of man.

“Haud inexpertus loquor.”

Cuba annexed, and her territory would be incorporated into our national domain, just as have been our acquisitions from France and Spain and Mexico. Her productions and commerce would go to make up our national wealth and greatness, in the same manner as have those of our Hispano-French territory of Louisiana, and our Hispano-Mexican, of New Mexico and California.

These facts, Mr. President, are all duly appreciated by Spain. She knows well, how indispensably important Cuba is to this country. She has seen, too, how, in the progress of years and of events, that importance has steadily and rapidly been increasing—increasing in the same ratio as our population has multiplied; increasing with the development of our resources; with the growth of our manufactures; with the expansion of our agriculture; with the enlargement of our national domain; with the achievements of our policy and our arts; with the swelling tides of our commerce in the Gulf of Mexico; and, most of all, since the settlements in California and Oregon, and in the Territory of Washington, by the establishment of our transit routes over the Central American Isthmus. The Senator from New York (Mr. SEWARD) has told us that—

“Spain holds the island now more tenaciously—with a stronger and safer grasp than that with which she has held it at any time within the last fifty years.”

And the Senator from Vermont (Mr. FOOT) concurs in the sentiment. No wonder, Mr. President; Spain has undoubtedly done all in her power to tighten her hold on Cuba, just as she has seen her daily increasing importance to us. She foresees, too, that the developments of every year, in the future, will still render Cuba more and more important to us; and she will endeavor to hold her from us by a still firmer grasp. And the Senator from New York has suggested that England and France will no doubt combine to second her. How imperative, then, upon us is the duty—the duty to act at once in this matter without hesitation.

2. Our second topic for consideration is: Is purchase the proper method to be adopted for the acquisition of the island?

I, sir, think it is. I know we have a long catalogue of unsatisfied claims, and of wrongs unatoned for, to press upon and enforce against old Spain; nay, sir, that many of these have the additional aggravation of having sprung out of outrages perpetrated in Cuba itself; that the hot pursuit of them, at the time of their perpetration, might even have justified the seizure of the island, as a mode of redress and indemnification. That seizure, too, could have easily been made. We could have adopted, in regard to it, the language of Cæsar to Metellus, on a memorable occasion: “*Durius est mihi hoc dicere, quam facere.*” But, sir, we allowed the moment of instantaneous vindication to pass. We resorted to diplomacy instead of reprisal; and now we are left to the chances and delays of negotiation. Of course, no just mind would harbor the idea of a forcible seizure, merely because the prize is desirable, and because we might be able to do it successfully. Robbery by the nation would be not less abhorrent to justice, than it is when perpetrated by the individual citizen. What other recourse is left to us, then, except to purchase? That certainly is fair, and it is peaceful. I think, too, it is honorable; honorable to our-

selves, it surely is, and not less so, in my opinion, to Spain. I know it has been characterized as insulting to Spain. But, sir, I am unable to see what disrespect there can be in making an offer to purchase, in a civil and courteous manner.

I know Spain is proud; and, perhaps, poor too—poor as well as proud. Is a proud man, or a proud nation, forbidden by honor to sell? And is the mere proposal to buy, to be considered an insult? And suppose such a man or nation should choose to consider the offer as a reminder of their poverty, can such false construction change the character of the act? On the contrary, the very necessities that recommend a sale as prudent, ought to invest the proposal to purchase, with the odor of kindness. But did not Spain sell Louisiana to the First Consul of the French? Did not he sell it to the United States? Has she not even sold Florida to this very country for a price? If it was no insult to Spain in 1819, to offer to buy, and actually to make a purchase of Florida from her, how can it now be an insult to this same Spain for the same United States to propose to purchase Cuba from her?

Nor do I forget, while on this point, the allegation that the people of the island are opposed to annexation. After the masterly and unanswerable refutation of that assumption by yourself, sir, (Mr. BENJAMIN in the chair,) a few days ago, I shall spend no time upon it. I shall pass it with the mere remark, that the history of Cuba for the last four years, so well known to our whole country, is a full and sufficient answer to this objection. And, sir, notwithstanding the compulsory protests which have been forced from Cuban municipalities by Spanish officials, and laid at the foot of the Spanish throne, deprecating the sale of the island, for myself, I am satisfied that the annexation of it to the United States, would be hailed by the entire people with the most enthusiastic rejoicings. Sir, are the inhabitants of Cuba insensible to exactions and burdens and oppressions, such as no people ever before groaned under? Have they no desire for relief—no aspiration for freedom? Are they content to be ground down by the heel of Spanish tyranny in all time to come, as they have been for years past, subject to martial law, and treated as a besieging conqueror does an invested and starving population?

But, Mr. President, the honorable Senator from New York concedes that Cuba must ultimately be annexed to the United States by the force of a *political gravitation*, as irresistible and as certain as the physical. If so, it must be, either by purchase, or by voluntary surrender, or by the conquest of war. A voluntary surrender of the island to us by Spain, without any equivalent, is not expected by the Senator from New York. I apprehend that that is a sentiment that none of us can entertain, or an event that we can believe at all practical in the future, for the Senator says, and truly says, that Spain holds Cuba with a firmer grasp now than she has ever done for fifty years past, and is aided in doing so by the combined power of England and France.

Then there is only one of the other two modes left—purchase or conquest.

If by purchase, it is evident at the first glance, that the price to be paid will never be less than at the present moment. On the contrary, the probabilities are, that it will be constantly and greatly enhanced. If by war, we all know that that mode will be infinitely more costly than any purchase can by any possibility be, to say nothing of the other direful evils that must result from the conflict to Spain, and even to Cuba herself. Be-

sides, sir, our policy is not the conquests of war. It always has been, and I trust always will be our policy to make our conquests of territory, as well as of everything else, the conquests of peace.

3. The third inquiry is, are we able to pay the price?

Who doubts the ability of this great nation? I ask emphatically, who doubts it? In 1803, when in our national infancy, within the first fourteen years after the establishment of our Government, we were able to purchase Louisiana, a domain far more princely than the Island of Cuba, and about equal, at that time, to all the other domain of the Government. Are we less able to make the purchase now? Since then, we have acquired Florida from Spain, and immense tracts of country from Mexico—Louisiana, Florida, New Mexico and California—all once the property of Spain. Have these vast regions, sufficient in themselves for an empire, diminished our resources? On the contrary, I ought rather to ask to what boundless extent have they not augmented them? Sir, however large may be the financial demands of this measure, the ability of this country is far more than equal to them; and Cuba is a prize not to be compared with them. Yet this was one of the two points of objection made by the Senator from New York, when this bill was reported to the Senate from the Committee on Foreign Relations. It has been dwelt on since by other Senators, and has been insisted on this morning.

But I call attention particularly to the grounds upon which it was placed by the honorable Senator from New York. The Senator said, that the bill presented two aspects, a financial and a political one. And he objected to it, first, for its financial aspect. In order to ground this objection, he made some most exaggerated assumptions. These assumptions are as follows:

First assumption. He assumed first, without any warrant, that the President, under this bill, would pay the price of \$250,000,000 to Spain for the Island of Cuba. Because it would be possible for the President to pay that sum, he *assumes* that it is certain that that sum will be paid. And this is his only ground for nominating \$250,000,000 as the price, and setting that down as an item of the public debt, which he figures up to "frighten us out of our propriety" on this question. I deny that it is any authority at all for the Senator's position. That sum stands as a mere naked assumption.

Second assumption. Next, he states that we were then proposing to build a railroad to the Pacific; and, upon no other ground, he forthwith assumes that we have an indebtedness upon us for this purpose, of \$125,000,000 more. But it has already been shown by the result, by the action of the Senate, that we shall have no such indebtedness upon us.

Third assumption. In the third place, he assumed, that because the President, in his annual message, recommended the throwing into the States of Chihuahua and Sonora, troops enough to afford protection to our citizens against Indian depredations and outrages, we, therefore, have taken upon us an indebtedness of \$100,000,000 more from this cause. In the first place, even if the suggestion of the President should be carried out, it would cost nothing like the sum assumed by the honorable Senator; and in the next place, the suggestion is not likely to be carried out. It has not even been proposed, to my knowledge, in either branch of Congress. The \$100,000,000, therefore, on this score, stands as an assumption merely.

Fourth assumption. In the fourth place, because the President suggests the propriety of granting him authority to employ the Army and Navy to resist the outrageous aggressions that are constantly being perpetrated upon the citizens of the United States, not only in regard to their property, but their persons, by the Spanish American States, he assumes that we are operated with an indebtedness of \$100,000,000 more from this cause.

Now, sir, I, for one, am very willing to incur any amount of reasonable indebtedness for the purpose of giving protection to our citizens in those Central American States. I was very glad when the bill reported by the Committee on Foreign Relations upon this subject, to which the Senator from Kentucky, (Mr. CRITTENDEN,) called the attention of the Senate in his remarks a few days since, which bill proposed to give power only to resist forcible aggressions upon the persons of our citizens, that you, sir, (Mr. BENJAMIN in the chair,) offered as a substitute another bill, which proposed to give immunity and security to the citizens of the United States on the territory of those Central American Republics, against aggression upon their property. Why, sir, we are told that when similar aggressions are made upon the citizens of any other country in any of the ports on the Gulf, as at Tampico, for instance, if a British citizen is robbed, or if a Frenchman is deprived of his goods, a British man-of-war, or a French armed vessel lying in the harbor, the commander demands immediate restitution, or the town will be battered down, and restitution is made; but if an American citizen is robbed, the commander of an armed vessel of the United States that lies there, may say, that redress is demanded and must be made, or else an appeal will be made to the authorities at Washington; and it may be that years after, Congress may give authority (as this Congress did at its last session in the case of Paraguay) to demand redress, when it ought to have been given on the spot to the man who was robbed. But we have done nothing, and I say that this assumption is just as groundless as any of the others to which I have referred. And so his indebtedness of \$500,000,000, conjured up by the honorable Senator, rests upon no better basis than mere assumptions—assumptions not only unwarranted by the facts, but contradicted by them. His objection, therefore, to the bill, because of the financial aspect it presents, must fail of effect.

But the Senator from Vermont objects, because we have not got the amount of money requisite now in the Treasury. Sir, if this objection be valid, we shall never purchase Cuba; for we will never have the money in the Treasury at any one time sufficient to do it. There has never been, and never will be, any large sum of money lying idle in the Treasury, so long as this Government shall continue to be administered in the spirit and sense of the Constitution.

Mr. President, I ought not to pass from this point without remarking, that the argument in opposition to the bill seems to me to be completely "*felo de se*." In one part of it, it is said, that we ought not to pass this bill because it will entail upon us an immediate debt of \$30,000,000, and a prospective one of, perhaps, \$200,000,000; or, as has been stated this morning, of \$250,000,000. In another part, it is said that it will be impossible for us to make the purchase. Now, sir, if we cannot make the purchase, we cannot incur the debt.

The objections to the measure on account of its political aspect are: first, it trusts the President with too large a sum of money. Sir, I am perfectly willing to trust the President with the money. For one, I do not

distrust his honesty. I am sure that if the amount be used at all, it will be well and lawfully used for the accomplishment of the very object for which it shall be placed in his hands. I am just as ready to put the amount into his hands, to be paid for the purposes of the treaty, when ratified by Spain, and before it shall be ratified by the United States, as I would be to put it into his hands after the treaty shall be ratified by the United States. We must trust him in either case.

But, sir, the measure is not without precedent; the same thing was done in 1803, in the case of Mr. Jefferson, to enable him to purchase Louisiana. And in the language of the committee which reported this measure, (*Annals of Congress*, 1803,) "a similar course was pursued for the purpose of settling our difficulty with the Regency of Algiers, by an appropriation of \$1,000,000, prior to the commencement of the negotiation." Next, the same thing was again done in the case of the purchase of Florida. By the act of the 13th of February, 1806, which used precisely the same language as the act of 26th of February, 1803, \$2,000,000 were placed in the hands of the President intended to be used, and so understood at the time, for the purchase of Florida; and this sum remained in the hands of the President until that purchase was consummated. And again, the same thing was done in 1847, in the case of President Polk, to enable him, by treaty, to acquire territory from Mexico. The Louisiana and Florida cases were much stronger than the measure now proposed; for although it was understood that the money in these cases was put into Mr. Jefferson's hands to purchase Louisiana, in the first instance, and Florida in the next, yet the purpose is not expressed in the acts of Congress, but the money in both cases was intrusted to him, as a part of the foreign intercourse fund, and without indicating the object to which it was to be applied.

We propose, then, to acquire Cuba by this measure, after the same manner of procedure in which we acquired territory from Mexico, and in a way less liable to the objection urged by the Opposition, than that by which our patriotic predecessors purchased the immense domain of Louisiana, and the province of Florida.

Our present patriotic President is just as worthy of being trusted in this case as were Mr. Jefferson and Mr. Polk in the cases parallel to the present. Our predecessors trusted *them*, and I am just as willing to trust Mr. Buchanan.

The Senator from Kentucky (Mr. CRITTENDEN) a few days since spoke of the purchase of Louisiana as an exceptional case, and dwelt on the circumstances of it. Sir, we have purchased territory from but three nations—France, Spain, and Mexico. In each one of these cases, our Government has taken exactly the same steps that are proposed to be taken by this bill. I deny, therefore, that the Louisiana case was an exceptional one. On the contrary, it was the first one of an unbroken series of cases, exactly similar. In this bill we propose to follow a rule for the purchase of Cuba which stands without a single exception in all our past history.

Again, it is objected to the political aspect of the measure, that Cuba has a population of some twelve or fifteen hundred thousand, about one half of whom are whites; and of the other half, about two parts are slaves, and one part free blacks; and it is said we ought to know beforehand what is to be the *status* of the white population; what the *status* of the free-colored inhabitants; what the *status* of the slaves; what are to be the institutions of justice and religion.

Mr. President, this is no objection to the particular mode of purchase now proposed. It is an objection against purchasing Cuba by treaty at all. For, in any and every case of purchase, the treaty must settle these questions to just exactly the same extent, as it will, if the measure under discussion be adopted. The objection is just as strong, just the same in all respects, against a treaty upon which no payment of money shall be made in advance of its ratification by the Senate, as it is to the one contemplated by this bill.

The Senator from New York also says: "To-day England and France are not only allies, but they are united in the policy of maintaining Spain in the enjoyment of the Islands of Cuba and Porto Rico." Sir, if we wish to purchase, and Spain is willing to sell, it is a matter that England and France have nothing to do with. It is none of their business; and so far as a threat is implied of their combined intervention, it has no terrors for me. It will have no terrors for the people of the United States. On the contrary, they will be for the acquisition for this very reason. If England and France wish a war with this country upon that issue, they can have it, and have it to their heart's content. Let them interfere in warlike posture, and we will fling defiance in their teeth. We will fight them with the last dollar of our means, and to the last drop of our blood; and I will say, in answer to the Senator from Kentucky, (Mr. THOMPSON,) who spoke yesterday, the "*first*" drop of our blood. Thousands of them are ready to spend the first drop and the last drop of their blood, if it be demanded on that question.

Mr. President, the Senator from New York, with great skill, insinuates as an objection to this bill, that it is unconstitutional. He says:

"When he (the President) has once obtained the Island of Cuba, and paid \$30,000,000 as an advance upon the consideration money of the purchase, the treaty will be a contract executed, and Spain and the whole world would laugh with derision at the pretence that we could rescind the contract and repudiate the remaining debt on the ground that we had then looked into our Constitution and had found that we had violated it in passing the law by which we had authorized the President to make the improvident bargain."

Now, sir, if to pass this bill would be to violate the very charter of our liberties, that is objection enough to it. It ought to be at once rejected. But, Mr. President, the honorable Senator will not maintain that proposition. Sir, it violates no provision of the Constitution. And, as I have already said, it follows precedents already acted on, but does not go so far as Congress went in the purchase of Louisiana.

4. Our other point of inquiry is: Is the present a fitting juncture to propose the negotiation.

If not, why not? Will Spain ever be more willing or more constrained by her necessities to sell, than she is at the present moment? The Senator from New York seemed to think, that she is less disposed and less necessitated to sell now, than she has been for the last fifty years. Is not the acquisition sufficiently desirable now, to both this country and to the people of Cuba? If the present is not an opportune juncture, when will such an occasion arise? The opponents of this bill will not assume the position that we ought never to acquire Cuba under any circumstances, but they say the present moment is premature. Has any one of them told us when the auspicious occasion will transpire? Will any one tell us? Sir, the reasons that will lead to procrastination to-day, will lead to procrastination for all time to come.

The Senator from New York seems to have settled down in the conclusion, that the time for opening negotiations for the purchase of Cuba has not yet arrived, and yet it seems to him, he says, that "the island gravitates back again to the parent continent, from which it sprang." But when and how this gravitation will effect the reannexation, the Senator has not undertaken to tell us. He will not even venture to guess. I ask, again, when will the right juncture come to pass?

Let us bear in mind, Mr. President, that the ripe apple requires to be plucked from its native tree; and it must be plucked as soon as it is ripe. If deferred beyond maturity, the rich fruit will have lost its value; the golden opportunity will have passed away forever. This Cuban fruit, I trust, is even now ripe for the gathering.

Mr. SEWARD. Will the honorable Senator excuse me for interrupting him?

Mr. POLK. Certainly.

Mr. SEWARD. I am unwilling to leave the Senator in doubt on that subject. I cannot tell when the juncture will arrive; but I can tell him when the juncture will not arrive; and that is when, instead of Spain proposing to the United States to cede Cuba, or being ready to accept the proposition of the United States for Cuba in the ordinary course of negotiation, for a price to be submitted, and upon terms to be submitted by the President of the United States to Spain, with the advice and consent of the Senate of the United States, and approved by them, for the payment of an appropriation of \$30,000,000, in advance, I imagine that at that time there may be a favorable juncture for the proposition; but when it is necessary to call upon the Congress of the United States for the \$30,000,000, to be paid out at all hazards, to obtain a treaty which the Senate of the United States properly refuses to ratify, thus forfeiting the \$30,000,000, then I think the juncture has not arrived.

Now, I wish to ask the honorable Senator one question, which will deserve his consideration. How is it, what has happened, what has befallen the President of the United States to bring about this strange result, that he cannot carry on a proper negotiation for a lawful, reasonable, just, and feasible object, in the forms of the Constitution, and according to the customs of our Government, until he obtains an indorsement from the Congress of the United States, with an appropriation of \$30,000,000, to enable him to begin with, beyond what it was before when the United States had a President that would avow—

Mr. POLK. I did not give way for the Senator to make a speech. If he is going on with the question, I will hear him with great pleasure.

Mr. SEWARD. I will conclude my speech by the question: when was it before that the President of the United States would confess, in the face of the whole world, that he was desirous to make a proposition to a foreign Power, and yet could not make it, unless the Congress of the United States would authorize and make an appropriation of money in advance?

Mr. POLK. I will commence what I have to say as following the Senator's interruption, by answering the question he has just now put. The answer is, that I have given him three instances in which the Presidents of the United States did not enter into negotiations for the purpose of making the purchase, until Congress had made appropriations of money in advance. The very first instance that has occurred in our history, the case of Mr.

Jefferson, which I gave him, was one in which the money was put into Mr. Jefferson's hands, and not specified in the bill to be for the purpose of purchasing Louisiana, but as a part of the foreign intercourse fund. I say further, in answer to the Senator, that the very same thing was done in the Florida case. So, also, in the case of the acquisition from Mexico. There is not a single exception in all our acquisition of territory by treaty.

Mr. SLIDELL. If my friend from Missouri will permit me, I will state, that the money put into the hands of the President, in 1806, for the purchase of Florida, remained at the disposal of the Administration for sixteen years, applicable to that purpose.

Mr. POLK. And of course, therefore, until the purchase of Florida was consummated.

Now, Mr. President, the Senator from New York rose to explain to me what his views were in answer to a question that I was putting. In the course of his explanation, he said he should deem that a fitting juncture had not arrived until Spain had offered to sell. I ask the Senator if he will say he will never go for the acquisition of Cuba until Spain shall offer to sell.

Mr. SEWARD. The honorable Senator does not state the whole of my proposition.

Mr. POLK. Mr. President, I did not state the whole of his *propositions*, but I stated the whole of *one* of his propositions.

Mr. SEWARD. No, sir.

Mr. POLK. The Senator went on to make an addition of some half a dozen more. He went on to make a speech in answer.

Mr. SEWARD. Will the Senator state my proposition?

Mr. POLK. I asked the honorable Senator if he did not put that as one of the events upon which only he would agree to the purchase of Cuba.

Mr. SEWARD. I am perfectly willing to answer the honorable Senator, provided he will allow me to answer his questions as to what I did state. It was this: that a fitting juncture had not arrived when neither would Spain sell to the United States, nor could the President of the United States, without being backed by an appropriation of \$30,000,000, make a proposition to the Court of Spain to buy it. That was my position.

Mr. POLK. In answer to that, I have to say, that the Senator cannot state that the juncture has not arrived in which Spain will sell. Sir, there is a very great difference between the Spanish minister having said what he did to the Cortes, and the response that the Spanish Cortes made to his declaration on the one hand, and the sale of the island on the other. I shall come to that as I proceed.

But, sir, the Senator from New York did not assume—and I want him to assume it, if he means to do it, directly and categorically—that he is opposed to the purchase of Cuba, under *any circumstances*. The Senator from New Hampshire (Mr. HALE) did say he was opposed to it. He did not speak of the time in the future at which this island should be brought back to us by "gravitation." He did not speak of the political necessity compelling the sale of the island at some future time; but, while the honorable Senator from New York, in his speech, opposed the bill, at the same time it seemed to me—I may do the Senator injustice, but, as I heard his speech, and as I have read it since, it seemed to me—that he was very un-

willing to assume any opposition to the acquisition; and wished that it should be understood that he was in favor of the acquisition of Cuba; but not just now. Hence, I was asking if this is not the juncture, when will the juncture arrive? If you are in favor of the acquisition of Cuba at all, and you say this is not a proper time for it, I ask you to tell me when that proper occasion will come to pass?

Mr. SEWARD. Does the honorable Senator pause for an answer now?

Mr. POLK. Yes, sir.

Mr. SEWARD. When the juncture shall come it will be a practical question, and then I will answer it. Until then it is an abstraction; and I expressly said in my speech, upon which he is commenting, that the question of the purchase of Cuba is not now before the Senate or the country. It is totally impracticable.

Mr. POLK. That is just what I said the honorable Senator's position was. I have stated that he said this juncture is not now upon us; and now what does the honorable Senator tell us? He tells us that he will be in favor of the acquisition of Cuba when the *proper time* arrives. That is the substance of his remark.

The only plausible ground that I have heard thus far brought as showing that this is not a fitting juncture; that the occasion is not one in which it is probable that the purchase would be successful, is, that the Spanish minister expressed a determination against it to the Spanish Cortes, and that that body concurred with him in the expression of that sentiment. That is the only probable or plausible ground upon which the position has been assumed in opposition to the bill by the Senators on the other side. Upon what knowledge have they based the assumption, as I undertake to say it is, and will show that it is, that this is not the proper juncture? How can that be known? Has the attempt been made? One thing is certain; the purchase never will be accomplished until the offer shall be made. Then why not make it, and make it now? Is not the prize desirable enough to justify it?

We have seen already, Mr. President, by the act of Congress referred to, that there was put into the hands of President Jefferson, in 1806, a large amount of money, to enable him to effect the purchase of Florida; and it remained there until 1819. I ask, therefore, in this immediate connection, how was it in the case of Florida? Did not the Spanish Government show great reluctance to part with Florida? But, sir, political necessity and the force of circumstances, and above all the conviction that our Government was resolved upon the measure, overcame the reluctance of Spanish pride.

The people of the province were desirous of annexation to the United States. In 1810, West Florida erected herself into an independent State, and applied for admission into our Union. The United States took temporary possession of the country, claiming title by virtue of her treaty with France. Great Britain protested. Again, in 1818 the troops of the United States, under General Jackson, took military possession of the entire province—East as well as West Florida. Spain protested vehemently. But Florida was necessary to the protection of our southern frontier, in a military point of view. It was necessary in order to give us access to the Gulf of Mexico. It was necessary for the accommodation of our commerce, and for the expansion of our territory.

Spain saw that there was a purpose, with earnestness and determination, on the part of this Government to acquire Florida. Florida was purchased

by treaty, in 1819; and even after the treaty was made, Spain was still reluctant to give possession, and possession was not taken, I believe, until 1820, and not until a menacing procedure was taken on the part of the Congress of the United States, for the purpose of compelling Spain to carry out that treaty.

How similar in character were the facts and surroundings in the case of Florida *then* to those of Cuba *now*—only in the multitude and strength of them far less. But the negotiation for acquisition was successful in the case of Florida; why shall it not also be successful in the case of Cuba?

Sir, I by no means concede that the effort to purchase Cuba will be abortive. Let it be once understood by Spain that this Government is resolved upon it, and that it has taken steps towards it with earnestness and purpose, and, in my opinion, the work will be well-nigh accomplished. Of this same opinion was one of the most sagacious men that ever held office in Cuba—a man who thoroughly understood Cuban affairs; who thoroughly understood the political necessities of the island, and its relations both to Spain and to this country. I allude to the Conde de Villaneuva. He said:

“So long as the affair is in the hands of private fillibusters, we can defend the island; but when the American Government takes the question in hand, we must look for another solution.”

Does not General O'Donnell, the Spanish Premier, who was, for a long time, Captain General of the island, know the same thing? Sir, Spain knows very well that she is fated ultimately to lose Cuba. All her continental possessions in the New World, and all her islands, too, except only Cuba and Porto Rico, have passed forever from her grasp; and all of them, except those now held by the United States, have been wrested from her by force. Can she expect to retain Cuba? What has happened, in the course of events, with all her other transatlantic possessions, will also happen, in the fulness of time, with Cuba. Why, sir, in order to keep down the inhabitants, and to prevent them from making the conquest of the island for themselves, she is compelled to garrison it continually with twenty-five or thirty thousand troops, and to blockade its ports with her men-of-war. Will she not prefer to sell it for a fair consideration, rather than to yield it up for nothing? Let Spain be assured that the United States want the island, and that its inhabitants want her to have it, and, moreover, that the former are willing to pay her the full value for it: will she not see that it will be wise to sell it? Will this not be “the coincidence of opportunity and necessity,” which, according to the Senator from New York, must bring about the sale?

Moreover, let the Spanish ministry see, as the Senator from New York sees, that Cuba gravitates to the United States as the ripened apple, yet hanging on its native tree, gravitates to the earth; and they will then also see, in the language of the honorable Senator, that “political necessities have determined that ultimate conclusion to which they must come.” And that conclusion, I add, is most clearly the sale of the island to the United States. Sir, I make my thanks to the honorable Senator for what he has said on this point. These are his words:

“I have always received as a political maxim the declarations made by our predecessors in regard to the acquisition of Cuba. Every rock and every grain of sand in that island were drifted and washed out from American soil by the floods of the Mississippi, and the other estuaries of the Gulf of Mexico. The island has seemed to me, just as our predecessors have said, to gravitate back again to the parent continent from which it sprang. I have supposed that political necessities would deter-

mine that ultimate conclusion ; and I know that to political necessities all actions of government must bend, and all sentiments of nations must accommodate themselves."

This, sir, is a full answer to all that has been said, or that can be said, against the present bill, for the inopportuneness, or impolicy, or hopelessness of the measure it proposes.

Sir, let one of those violent revolutionary storms come down upon Spain, to which we know she has been so often exposed in the recent past, and her Crown and ministry, in order to save themselves, may be willing to treat Cuba as the mariner in a gale does his cargo—throw overboard even the most precious part of it, in order to save himself from shipwreck.

But, sir, whether the result be success or failure, in this case of Cuba, I adopt the sentiment and the language of the report of the committee in the case of the acquisition of Louisiana :

"If the purchase *can* be made, we ought not to hesitate. If the attempt should fail, we shall have discharged an important duty."

Mr. President, it was once said by one of my illustrious predecessors upon this floor, that the western limit of our Republic was never to extend beyond the Rocky Mountains (I do not quote the language ;) that the god Terminus had fixed our furthest western boundary upon the summits of that mountain-range. But, sir, subsequent events, in the lapse of comparatively only a few years, have proved the prediction to have been fallacious. The swelling tide of our population and enterprise, impelled by the spirit of Anglo-Saxon progress and adventure, has burst over the mountain barrier, spread itself over the golden sands of California, until it has met the waves of the Pacific sea. And now the reflux tide is returning, by the way of Central America and the Island of Cuba, to the Atlantic shore, from which it started.

I am glad, sir, that in that eloquent apostrophe, in which the honorable Senator from Virginia a few days ago expostulated with the young giant of the West, as he most appropriately called him, he did not dissuade him from the acquisition of Cuba by the use of all just and honest means. In his infancy he needed for his immediate growth the ancient Louisiana. Under the auspices of Mr. Jefferson it was purchased for him. Twenty years afterwards, that same sagacious, philosophical statesman saw that he would soon need the Island of Cuba also. And now sir, in *our day*, when he is in the vigor and prowess of his young manhood, that necessity is upon us. This bill proposes to meet it ; and I, for one, respond to it.